

Chess in 1924

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The great New York tournament was, of course, *the* event of the year, but what else happened in the chess world in 1924?

In a sense the answer is: surprisingly little. For Lasker, Capablanca and Alekhine, New York, 1924 was their sole formal appearance. Indeed, it was Capablanca's only serious chess between August 1922 and November 1925. The Immortal Trio did, however, offer a number of simultaneous exhibitions. Here too Capablanca was the least prolific, giving just a handful, in the United States. Alekhine had preceded the New York tournament with an extensive tour of the US, also venturing into Canada, and Lasker's 1924 displays were held in the Soviet Union, the USA, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Holland. Alekhine's uncustomary inactivity – or, better say, quiescence – throughout the rest of 1924 is largely explained by a commitment to annotating all the games from the New York tournament. His book was published in German, English and Russian editions in 1925, and a Spanish version came out just after the Second World War. Rarely indeed has a tournament book appeared in so many languages.

The year had begun – as years still do – with the Christmas/New Year Congress at Hastings, an event won by a relative newcomer, the 22-year-old Max Euwe, with a score of +7 –1 =1, half a point ahead of a relative oldgoer, Géza Maróczy. It was Maróczy who scored the draw, and Euwe's loss was at the hands of the Belgian Edgard Colle. On page 23 of *Fifty-*

One Brilliant Chess

Masterpieces

, a Colle anthology published in 1950, Reinfeld wrote, 'With this game the fiery elegance of Colle's attacking play became known to the chess world'.

Although it was not a particularly strong line-up at Hastings, Mieses, then 59, came two places from the bottom.

On 31 January Curt von Bardeleben, desperately impoverished, committed suicide by throwing himself out of the second-floor window of his residence in Berlin. Nowadays he is seldom mentioned except for his loss to Steinitz at Hastings, 1895, a game which Napier nominated as the finest ever played, and it is all but forgotten that in the same event von Bardeleben defeated the then world champion, Lasker. His many brief matches included wins and draws against masters of the standing of Blackburne, Teichmann, Spielmann and Leonhardt, but today it is almost as if they had never been played.

The day after von Bardeleben's demise came the death of the 'Queen of Chess', Mrs W.J. Baird of England. Her obituary on page 125 of the March 1924 *BCM* estimated that she had composed over 2,000 problems, in addition to being 'a valiant opponent over the board' and an accomplished archer.



Mrs W.J. Baird

The Merano tournament (4-22 February – the tournament immortalized by the Meran Variation) was won by Ernst Grünfeld, well ahead of Spielmann and Rubinstein. The ageing Tarrasch could do no better than finish tenth out of 14 players, but he captured the brilliancy prize for his defeat of Colle. Grünfeld is another master whose accomplishments have yet to be given their full due. The first phase of his career (1911-1920) was well covered by Michael Ehn in a monograph from the Wiener Schachverlag in 1993, but no sequel has yet been published, and to many players nowadays Grünfeld is just an opening and not a human being.

By 1924 hypermodernism was close to its peak, with the openings propaganda war in full swing. Tartakower's *Die hypermoderne Schachpartie* had started to appear the previous year, and the January 1924 *Wiener Schachzeitung* (pages 5-12) offered the rare spectacle of two leading theoreticians, Grünfeld and Tartakower, debating its analysis. Grünfeld himself wrote a book in 1924, *Die Damenbaueröffnung und das Damengambit*, but it would seem to have had little impact. (Confusingly, another 1924 book was *Das Damengambit und Damenbauerspiel* by K. Emmrich. Its impact, if any, is even less evident.) After 1 d4 d5 Grünfeld's practice at this time was to give an exclamation mark to 2 c4, claiming (*Deutsche Schachzeitung*, September 1924, page 209) that '2 Nf3 Nf6 3 c4! c5! 4 cxd5' was weaker for White, and, in fact, gave Black equality. At all levels of the chess world it was proving a struggle to come to terms with the newfangled openings. The game Torre v Jennings, New York, 1924 began 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 Nc3 b6 4 e4 Bb7 5 Bd3 Bg7, prompting C.S. Howell to remark (*American Chess Bulletin*, December 1924, page 217): 'Chess rules need revision, indeed, if Black must resort to the double

“fianshutyourpiecesin” defense.’

Not that all theoreticians were solely concerned with openings theory. The March *Wiener Schachzeitung* (pages 77-78) reported that Réti had profited from a visit to Saragossa to undertake a little detective work, investigating the well-publicized claim that José Juncosa y Molina had set a world record by playing 32 blindfold games simultaneously and winning 29 of them. In the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* Réti filed his report; Juncosa had actually played five games. The other 27 opponents had signed up but not turned up.

After the New York tournament Réti went to South America and later in the year, playing *hors concours*, won the third Argentine National Tournament in Buenos Aires, finishing no fewer than four and a half points ahead of Roberto Grau. The ebullient Boris Kostić toured Australia and South Africa.

In early April Euwe won a match in Zutphen (Holland) against Colle (+5 –3 =0) and later the same month returned to Britain to win the Weston-super-Mare tournament, in front of Sir George Thomas and Znosko-Borovsky. Although it was a ten-man all-play-all event, there were three days when two rounds were played, thereby enabling the contest to be completed within a week. Euwe was also becoming a prolific writer, mainly in *Tijdschrift van den Nederlandschen Schaakbond*, where an increasing number of annotated games ended with ‘M.E.’.



Max Euwe

Meanwhile the June 1924 *BCM* went badly astray by reporting the death of the French problemist Gustave Lazard, its claim being based on a simple misunderstanding. In fact, Lazard (perhaps one should say Lazarus) lived on until 30 November 1948, as recorded by *L'Échiquier de Paris*, January-February 1949, page 6. His younger, more famous brother Frédéric predeceased him by 12 days.



Frédéric (left) and Gustave Lazard

The name of the 18-year-old Vera Menchik started to be seen more often in chess periodicals, and page 273 of the July 1924 *BCM* commented that her style was 'a demonstration both of her own talent and of the benefit she has derived from Maróczy's coaching'. Just three years later she won the women's world championship, a title she retained until her death in 1944.

Mieses and Teichmann shared first prize in a small Leipzig tournament (27 June-1 July), each winning all his games apart from the draw in their individual encounter. Another event that summer was the Paris Olympic Tournament in July. Participants in the complex set-up included Colle, Duchamp, Euwe, Mattison, Rey Ardid and Rueb, and the top honours, together with the not altogether prestigious title of 'Amateur World Champion', went to Mattison. The whole tournament was despatched in just one week. Bringing up the rear in national terms were Russia and Yugoslavia, but this was because they were represented by only one player and two players respectively. A book on the tourney, containing 258 games, was published by M.A. Lachaga in Argentina, but not until nearly 50 years later.

Paris, 1924 also marked the foundation of the *Fédération Internationale des Echecs*

, with the appointment of the above-mentioned Alexander Rueb of The Hague as its President. Initially there were 15 signatories to FIDE: Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. The Lachaga book reprinted the document which established the organization, whose statutory aims were expressed as follows:

' *La Fédération Internationale des Echecs aura pour but le développement de l'art des échecs, comme jeu universel, de propager l'idée d'entente entre les fédérations, de favoriser toute démonstration internationale relative au jeu d'échecs.*

With the ink scarcely dry on these noble generalities, the politicking began.

Deutsches Wochenschach wanted to know what would be done about countries with a strong racial minority which had formed an independent chess association, such as the German Chess Association in Czechoslovakia. The 'Olympic Tournament' itself had provoked controversy, on the grounds that it could not legitimately decide the amateur championship of the world while nations such as Germany and 'German Austria' were barred.

Also in the summer of 1924 the British Championship was held in Southport. It was won by H.E. Atkins, who celebrated his 52nd birthday during the event. It was his eighth national title, though the first since 1911. (He was also to win once more, in 1925.) The 'Major Open' tournament played concurrently found Rubinstein outclassing a rather weak field, scoring 11 straight victories.

The Dutch championship in Amsterdam was won by Euwe, ahead of Jacques Davidson, and towards the end of the year the two played a match, which Euwe won +5 -1 =3. J.H. Morrison won the Canadian Championship in Hamilton with a score of +13 -0 =2, and page 176 of the September-October 1924 *American Chess*

Bulletin recorded: 'Play went full steam ahead, with two rounds a day and three on the Friday, in order to meet the requirements of those players whose time was limited.'

Around the same period the Hungarian Chess Federation Congress in Győr was won by Nagy ahead of Przepiórka and Asztalos. Later in the year Maróczy, who had finished only equal eighth, brought out the tournament book, with light notes in German. At the Nordic Chess Congress in August, Nimzowitsch outshone all rivals, scoring +9 -0 =1 to finish first ahead of P. Johner. It was Nimzowitsch's only formal event of 1924, but he was writing extensively, and his first two books, *Die Blockade* and *Mein System*, were to be published the following year.

Detroit was the venue for the 25th Western Chess Association Tournament (23 August-2 September). The prodigy Reshevsky, his days as a touring *Wunderkind* behind him, came fifth, and it was the 18-year-old Carlos Torre who emerged victorious from the 17-man field, by a two-and-a-half point margin.



Carlos Torre

The July-August *American Chess*

Bulletin (page 156) remarked that 'Carlos Torre, the young Mexican expert, who for several years has made his home in New Orleans, where he outranked all others in interest in chess, recently came to New York and affiliated himself with the Marshall Chess Club. Like Capablanca, he has shown himself to be almost invincible in rapid transit play, although primarily he prefers slow, studious play.' On pages 166-170 of the September-October issue of the same magazine, C.S. Howell presented some of Torre's best games and offered a challenging comment on the Mexican:

'He lacks technique and for the sake of his chess future, I hope that he will not hasten too much in cultivating it. Acquired naturally and as a result of the experience of play, technique is a valuable asset but the attempt to acquire it before one's ability to combine has been fully developed has stopped permanently the improvement of a good many young players.'

The All-Russian tournament of 1924 (i.e. the third USSR Championship), played from 28 August to 15 September, was won by Bogoljubow, two and a half points clear of Romanovsky. Other well-known participants included Bogatyrchuk, Levenfish, I. Rabinovich and Dus-Chotimirsky. The Soviet

Union was paying ever more attention to Western chess, and 1924 saw the publication of Russian translations of two Capablanca books, *My Chess Career* and *Chess Fundamentals*. The former had a striking silhouette of the Cuban on the front cover, and the editions doubtless helped pave the way for the extraordinary popularity that he was to enjoy during his stay in the Soviet Union the following year.



On 1 September J.H. Blackburne died at the age of 82, although most of the obituaries mysteriously gave his year of birth as 1842 instead of 1841. Inevitably many also spoke of the end of an era and the last link with a bygone age, phrases which were to be wheeled out again the following year when Amos Burn died and, once more, with the death of Gunsberg in 1930. Due emphasis was placed on the magnificence and duration of Blackburne's career, and there were many anecdotes about his happy-go-lucky approach to simultaneous displays, counter-balanced by occasional references to his testiness. On page 402 of the October 1924 *BCM*, John Keeble reminisced:

'Mr Blackburne held one peculiar view on chess. I showed him a problem in which *en passant* occurred. He at once said he thought that when an International Chess Federation is formed, one of their first acts will be to abolish Pxp *en passant* from the game of chess, and I think he meant it, for in later years he adhered to that view.'



Joseph Henry Blackburne

Other notable deaths in 1924 included George E. Carpenter (a gifted problemist), Eugène Chatard (who has the distinction of joint billing with Alekhine in a variation of the French Defence), Harry Davidson (a strong player from Philadelphia), Václav Kautský (one of Czechoslovakia's leading chess figures, dead at only 44) and Stepan Levitzky (immortalized by his loss to Marshall at Breslau, 1912).

It cannot be asserted that 1924 was a vintage year for chess literature. Alekhine's book of the Hastings, 1922 tournament finally showed up, and the *BCM* (June 1924 issue, page 225) commented darkly, 'the late appearance of the book is not, we believe, due at all to the editor and printer'. In his preface to the book W.H. Watts also referred to the delay, absolving himself of blame, and adding blandly that there seemed to have been 'a misunderstanding between the parties concerned'. In a rare tribute from one leading master to another, Rudolf Spielmann produced a 178-page monograph in Swedish on Schlechter's best games and problems. Another important work was Troitzky's *500 Endspielstudien*. On a lower literary rung stood *Chess of To-day* by Alfred Emery, about which the December *BCM* (page 485) remarked, 'Despite the increased cost of printing and paper since 1914, we think that a cloth cover might have been provided for the half-crown.' The magazine (June 1924 issue, page 226) had been more impressed by a book published earlier in the year, *Chess Masterpieces* by W.H. Watts, 50 annotated games and 'the cheapest shillingsworth we have seen for many a long day'. The *American Chess Bulletin* (May-June 1924, page 131) also liked it, but revealed itself as a stickler for historical accuracy concerning the book's illustrations: 'it might be well to point out that Alekhine has since shaved off his moustache

and that Bogoljubow has become a jolly '200-pound master' – a fact that the photographs in this book would hardly lead one to surmise.'

In a relatively quiet year for chess, periodicals had much space available for dross and trivia. A news item in the November issue of the *Chess Amateur* (page 34) read, in full: 'The Bury and West Suffolk Chess Club is now starting its 57th season with a strong membership.' The same month the *BCM* announced (page 447): 'The Grimsby Chess Club has just entered on its jubilee season and has had an unbroken record of unostentatious success. There are nearly 60 members, one of whom once beat Capablanca in a simultaneous display.' The same month F.P. Betts of London, Ontario had a letter published on page 204 of the *American Chess Bulletin* in which he denounced a book by Edward Lasker (unnamed, but presumably *Chess and Checkers The Way to Mastership*) for using the 'extraordinary' algebraic notation. 'This mania for improving the established chess notation by freak innovations seems to entirely overlook the fact that there is an immense volume of chess literature centuries old in which the old and accepted notation is enshrined, the value of which would be greatly impaired if this novel jargon should become the vogue.'

One of the last tournaments of the year was a small double-round, four-man event in Berlin on 9-17 December, unexpectedly won by P. Johner of Switzerland ahead of Rubinstein, Teichmann and Mieses. (It was the final tournament of Teichmann's career, and he died about six months later.) Then, as 1924 drew to a close, it was back to Hastings with, for once, abandonment of the single all-play-all format. Maróczy and Tartakower were to finish equal first, but that news, of course, belongs to 1925.

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